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Agenda item 19

REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES ON ITS FORTY-FOURTH SESSION

Written statement submitted by Inuit Circumpolar Conference, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[4 March 1993]

On 4 March 1993, the President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference addressed the following letter to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights.

We understand that a resolution may be tabled on 5 March under item 19 of the Commission's agenda regarding the work of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). ICC has already made some remarks on this question in the current session of the Commission on Human Rights. We have reviewed draft resolutions prepared by Canada on this question, and have a number of concerns because of the failure of these resolutions to contemplate substantive action within the United Nations to properly commemorate the International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

First, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference is of the view that the WGIP, chaired by Mrs. Erica Daes, should be encouraged to complete its work on the draft declaration of indigenous rights during the eleventh session on the WGIP

this July. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference has been an active participant in the WGIP sessions and believes that completion of the draft declaration is a realistic objective. It should be recognized however, that the WGIP has not only a mandate involving standard setting, but that the WGIP also has a mandate to review developments affecting indigenous peoples. Inuit consider both of these functions of the WGIP to be important means of informing the United Nations of international issues affecting indigenous peoples. Inuit therefore believe it will be essential for the WGIP to continue performing its mandate to review developments even after its work on the draft declaration is complete.

While completion of the WGIP's intensive and well-considered work on the draft declaration is important, it is not enough. Any real progress in improving the socio-economic, civil and political situation of indigenous peoples requires that the United Nations demonstrate its commitment to the objectives of the International Year in actions that extend beyond the work of the WGIP. Inuit therefore believe it is equally important for the General Assembly to consider the draft declaration at its 1993 fall session in order to acknowledge and review this important work during the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. We feel the General Assembly should use this important occasion at the very least to consider, if not adopt, or approve in principle, the draft declaration on indigenous rights. The excellent work of the WGIP has brought the declaration to a point where we believe the General Assembly has an obligation to examine the draft declaration during the significant occasion of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. Review of the draft declaration would indicate the General Assembly's commitment to the principles and objectives of the Year, and we encourage all members of the Commission to recommend such an action.

We feel that any resolution adopted by the Commission on Human Rights respecting the International Year must acknowledge the need for a permanent body within the United Nations to provide advice, coordination and information regarding indigenous issues, and should reflect the United Nations commitment to progress on indigenous issues by expressing the desirability of including indigenous rights as a permanent agenda item of the Commission.

We also wish to bring to the Commission's attention our view that the regular date and location of the WGIP (in Geneva, during the last two weeks of July) should not be changed for its eleventh session. Many indigenous peoples may not learn of the change in time, many groups have planned their agendas around the usual date, and other locations will not offer the same network of support that indigenous peoples have established over the years in Geneva.

(Signed): Eileen MacLean
President